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SUBJECT: BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION TELLS BRATISLAVA THE
REVOLUTION HAS BEGUN; SANCTIONS COULD HELP

¶1. (SBU) At a March 3 briefing hosted jointly at the MFA by State Secretary (Deputy Minister) Magda Vasaryova and German Marshall Fund's Pavol Demes, Belarusian opposition figures Andrei Sannikov and Oleg Manaev told representatives from the Canadian, U.S., and EU embassies that the Lukashenko regime is "scared" and not in control following the March 2 pro-Milinkevich rally of thousands of youth in Minsk. Canadian Professor and author David Marples told those assembled that the prospects for change in Belarus are the best that they have been in a while; Sannikov -- who wore a blue ribbon made from denim in solidarity with the opposition movement -- said "I dare to say that yesterday the Belarusian revolution started." Sannikov also cited the more credible opposition of Aleksandr Kazulin as another positive development.

HOW TO AFFECT THE LUKASHENKO REGIME

¶2. (SBU) Manaev, a social scientist, stressed that the most important issue for Belarus will be to publish the "real" results (such as exit polling data) from the elections. Assuming that Lukashenko manipulates another victory for himself, Manaev said that the international community can influence the regime by publishing the names of the "nomenklatura" and others who have a hand in Lukashenko's usurpation of democracy, posting their names online to draw them into the international spotlight and away from the safety of "Lukashenko's shadow." Sannikov suggested that the international community consider a Hariri assassination-type investigation of Belarusian officials who might be responsible for the killings or disappearances of Belarusian opponents of Lukashenko.

¶3. (SBU) The international community can also affect Belarus by putting pressure on Russia, which Manaev says keeps Lukashenko on a "short leash" via its manipulation of gas prices.

ADDED URGENCY FOLLOWING MARCH 2

¶4. (SBU) The Belarusians said that the Minsk protest of March 2 "added urgency" to the situation, but that while the opposition feels solidarity and support, it lacks the protection of the international community. They urged the international community -- in the form of election monitors -- to "stay with us" as long as possible after the elections.

EU AMBASSADORS WARY OF SANCTIONS

¶5. (SBU) Both spoke highly of recent meetings in Minsk with

EUR DAS Kramer, who mentioned the possibility of sanctions. Manaev said that "Lukashenko is not dumb" and that he understands that the trade balance for Belarus is shifting away from Russia and towards the west, but that if Belarus' economy is allowed to grow, Lukashenko will not change his ways. (NOTE: Several EU Ambassadors were heard dismissing Manaev's outlook on sanctions on the way to their cars. END NOTE).
VALLEE